

# Greenery

## —an opportunity for forest landowners

For generations, materials gathered from American forests have been used for holiday decorations and floral arrangements including Christmas wreaths, roping, swags, and sprays. Forest species utilized for these products include Fraser fir, Norway and blue spruce, mountain laurel, boxwood, ivy, grape vine, juniper, Douglas fir, incense cedar, and holly. White pine (common in Central Appalachia) and White Noble Fir (common in the Pacific North West) are commonly used for many greenery products.

The most common holiday greenery products are Christmas wreaths and roping. Wreaths range in diameter from 12 to 48 inches, and roping is generally produced in lengths of 8 to 75 feet and sold in rolls. Other greenery products include swags, garlands, centerpiece arrangements, and loose greenery. The primary raw material is the ends of branches—short tips harvested from lower limbs.

The production of greenery products has excellent income potential for landowners in many regions. Income from just one year of tipping can more than offset planting and other plantation costs. Tipping can provide landowners with income while waiting for timber to

grow to merchantable size.

### Production

For our purposes, White pine provides an excellent example for greenery

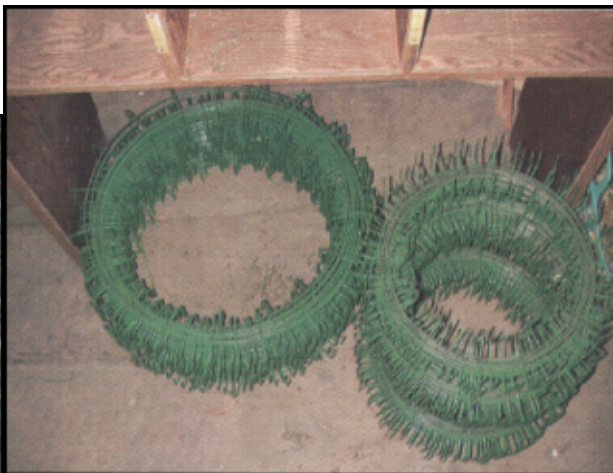
raw materials, and much of what follows is true of other species. Before incurring site preparation and planting costs, landowners should carefully consider where pine plantations are established. Poorly drained clayey soils, at elevations below 1,000 and above 3,000 feet, and dry southwestern slopes should be avoided. To produce healthy looking, dark green needles desired for the greenery industry, the correct soils and growing conditions are required. On well-drained sandy or mica-based soils, white pine will out-grow other tree species. North and east facing slopes and stream terraces are also desirable locations for establishing white pine plantations. However, other tree species will compete with white pine as soil fertility increases. Scaring from fire and thinning injury will make trees more susceptible to disease, such as red-brown butt rot.



Local farmer tipping greenery from Christmas trees for use in wreath making. Photo credit: Dylan Jenkins, Virginia Tech.

If the plantation site is an abandoned agricultural field, little site preparation may be necessary. All that may be required is application of a broadleaf herbicide prior to planting to control competition from grasses. Establishing stands may require intensive control of competing vegetation using a combination of herbicide applications, prescribed burning, and mowing.

Historically, white pine has been planted for timber and more recently for Christmas trees. These plantations now augment natural stands as source greenery tips. In many areas white pine is being planted to help sustain the local greenery industry. For example, Virginia's greenery industry consumes over 14 million pounds of tips each year, requiring at least 2,600 acres of quality white pine growing stock. But, according



*To build a wreath you need a frame and choice pieces of greenery! Photo credits left to right: Dylan Jenkins and A.L. Hammett, Virginia Tech.*

to people involved in the tipping industry there is tremendous need for more acreage planted for tips.

## Harvesting

Harvesting may begin when the tree is seven years old, and may continue for two to three cutting over a four-year period. Tipping generally begins as soon as Fall needle shedding is complete, which occurs about the second week of October, and continues through the middle of December. Tips are harvested, using hand shears or a sharp knife, from the lower four whorls of branches and are generally 8 to 18 inches long. Care should be taken to leave the end, or terminal, tip on the branch allowing the tree to produce tips on these branches in subsequent years.

No more than 50 percent of the greenery should be removed in any year.

## Marketing

Growers have many options to market their greenery tips. Perhaps most common is to sell them direct to wholesale buyers by weight or volume. Another option is to lease the harvesting rights. Some landowners will even harvest and produce their own wreaths and decorative items for sale at local markets and outlets (See Jenkins, Hammett, and Kays, 2000). The simplest method is to sell your tips by the tract. Generally a wholesale buyer will purchase tips on the tree from growers on an acre per year basis, usually under a three or four year contract. Tips are not currently sold using a sealed bid process, rather, a single buyer usually contacts the grower and they negotiate an acceptable arrangement.

A few larger wholesale buyers have developed a unique plant / tip / keep con-

tract with landowners. Under this arrangement the buyer plants the seedlings, pays for all site preparation fees, and, later has exclusive tipping rights for three to four years. In return, the landowner receives approximately \$100 per acre for each year of the agreement, and retains the growing stock with no further obligations after the tipping contract is complete. The landowner may then choose to allow the stand to grow to timber size, or may cut the trees and begin a new tipping cycle. While this arrangement is not as financially lucrative as planting and harvesting your own tips, it may be advantageous for landowners who favor a hands-off land management approach. The benefits from this type of arrangement are better than having marginal agricultural land lay fallow.

Another marketing option offers landowners the opportunity to produce their own finished greenery products (e.g., wreaths, swags, sways, and roping) for sale to local outlets. Buyers from large chains usually purchase hundreds if not thousands of pieces, so they may not be interested in dealing directly with a small greenery producers. Nevertheless, the small producer has many marketing outlets including nurseries, local grocery stores, craft stores, bed and breakfast operations, hardware stores and local advertising. Some small producers have developed successful mail order sales operations. Marketing of greenery products over the Internet has grown rapidly and allows producers to market at relatively low costs with access to more potential customers than via



Local tree farmer offer wreaths and many other greenery products for sale.  
Photo credit: A. L. Hammett, Virginia Tech.

conventional marketing techniques. Many Christmas tree growers earn extra income by selling trimming waste (tips) to makers of holiday greenery.

Holiday greenery provides an excellent opportunity for landowners to diversify forest-based income. Landowners growing Christmas trees or conifer species for timber may have a ready supply of raw materials for greenery. The landowner has many options to

benefits of this new venture.

#### *Selected references and information resources*

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